

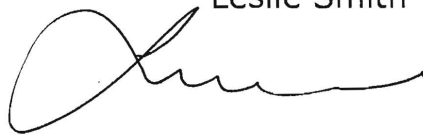
Through a New Lense:
An Analysis of Traveling and the Architecture Studio

An Honors Thesis (ARCH 402)

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leslie Smith', with a large, stylized initial 'L'.

5.02.14

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2014

Expected Date of Graduation
May 2014

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Abstract

A staple of architecture school is an emphasis on travel. At Ball State University's College of Architecture and Planning, part of the mission is to expand the learning environment to outside the classroom. One unique study abroad program offered is Polyark/World Tour. This semester long interdisciplinary program includes travel to approximately thirty countries throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa. While traveling, students develop a design studio project based on the observation and analysis of the world as a precedent. This project is the result of these experiences. I analyze this process by pinpointing key places as especially influential in the design project, explaining the importance of the study abroad program, and identifying the lasting impact travel has on design students.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Leslie Smith and Rod Underwood for organizing a life changing study abroad experience and always being available to critique my work. Additionally, I would like to thank all who were a part of the World Tour family for making the trip a richer experience. I see the world in a different way having traveled with you all.

Introduction

Human nature seems to dictate that all have an innate curiosity to see how others live. Throughout history, countless figures have succumbed to this urge to travel. The justification to see another side of the world often aligns with an individual's professional interests. Historically, it was necessary to advance one's career for artists, scientists, and authors to travel. Artists needed to see the great works of their peers and to paint subject matter. Scientists doing research often traveled to their subject's environment, just as Charles Darwin did by traveling to the Galapagos Islands. Ernest Hemingway was known for traveling from city to city and island to island all while writing some of the best known American novels. It is no surprise that architects and designers follow the same behavior.

An integral part of architectural education has always been travel. Surprisingly enough, the importance given to travel in architecture schools has not changed with the emergence of new technology. As previously stated, other professions historically put great emphasis on travel out of necessity. With such resources as the internet, much of this need has diminished. One could argue that great architecture is available through the internet, and therefore scholars need not spend time and money traveling abroad. However, architecture is not two dimensional. Spatial relationships are only fully appreciated and understood in a physical way. 3D modeling has captured only a snippet of what is felt by being present in a space.

Traveling is a full sensory experience that cannot be equally captured and shared with those not present.

College of Architecture and Planning – Travel Emphasis

In the words of T.S. Eliot, "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." This captures the essence of the dedication to travel at Ball State University's College of Architecture and Planning. A week of classes is substituted for a travel experience every fall in the College. In addition to this longstanding tradition, the College of Architecture and Planning has an array of study abroad programs that surpass their counterparts around the country, and new programs are emerging to complement existing study abroad opportunities. The College now offers programs that travel to Europe, South America, and Asia. The object of these programs is to expose students to a different way of thinking beyond what is available within the confines of the Ball State campus.

The World Tour/Polyark study abroad trip is a semester long program unlike any that I have seen offered. Students and faculty travel at a fast pace through Europe, Africa, and Asia studying some of the greatest and most well-known cities and sites of the world. To enhance the experience of students, a series of courses are compiled to aid in providing added worth to the World Tour. These courses cover topics including sustainable theory,

cultural analysis, and analytical sketching that culminate in the development of a studio project. When traveling, students have these topics and personal studio focus in the forefront of their minds allowing them to see the environment through a different lense.

Polyark / World Tour – CAP Interdisciplinary Study / Travel

Every student outlines a scope and program for a studio project prior to departing for the trip in a study abroad preparatory class. Each student selected a site and program based in a community that is very familiar to the individual. In the case of this project, San Angelo, Texas is a city very familiar to me, and one that I had been interested in exploring on a deeper level. Both of my parents grew up in this city and most of my family lives nearby still. I estimate that I have visited this city 40 separate times between annual winter visits and spending weeks with family over the summer growing up. Not only am I familiar with the culture, but I have been able to watch the city grow in the last few years. Biannual visits to a city allow one to see snapshots of progression.

Studio Project Background

San Angelo has historically been a perfect example of a small town in West Texas. The city was founded in 1867 with the construction of Fort Concho. This fort, situated at the junction of the North and South Concho

River, was one of the newest in the territory. The location was ideal due to the abundance of water from the river, OC Fisher Lake, and Lake Nasworthy nearby; the city is known as the oasis of west Texas for this reason. Named Santa Angela after the wife of the town's settler, the city was later changed to San Angelo for the easier pronunciation. (San Angelo)

The city attracted trade of the local farmers and businesses. The young city evolved into a magnet for illegal activity in its first couple decades. With the growth of the railroads, San Angelo became a hub for transportation bringing a large population and more stabilization to the city. To this day, sheep and cattle livestock trade is a staple of the San Angelo economy. (San Angelo)

In the last couple decades, there has been substantial growth in small businesses and new construction. San Angelo has been getting national recognition as one of the best places to find a job and start a small business. In 1999, the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts was opened downtown. This is connected with an outdoor amphitheater along the Concho River and a community pool that opened in the summer of 2012. These three spaces also link with a small park and pedestrian walkway across the river. (San Angelo)

San Angelo launched a campaign to improve the spaces along the river near downtown that is nearing completion. The goals of the Concho River Improvements Initiative are to increase river bank stabilization, repair and

design of trails, and to design spaces along the trail for community activities. This trail connects many of the city's major landmarks including the Visitors' Center that elegantly tells about San Angelo's history through an outdoor garden. (River Corridor Master Development Plan)

Recently, a new performing arts center has been built to help facilitate San Angelo's art community. In addition to performing arts, downtown has become a canvas for artists in on vacant walls and alleys. These murals and the art galleries make up the San Angelo Art Walk that occurs once a month. Outside of downtown, artists converted an old chicken farm into a community where 15 artists live and work. The city continues to support a growing interest in the arts. (San Angelo)

San Angelo has grown considerably in recent years becoming a prominent, up and coming city in Texas. The people have stayed true to their roots with many families still relying on crops, cotton, and livestock to support themselves, while encouraging new types of businesses to flourish in the city. In order for San Angelo to continue in their growth as a city, there is a need to focus on the agricultural advancements of the region. This would introduce a new focus in the industry within the region while keeping it grounded in a historically necessary aspect of the economy. As a result, the characteristics of San Angelo built a convincing case for a rich and rewarding Polyark/World Tour studio project exploration.

Studio Project Results

This project proposed a sustainable dining campus be built along the Concho River between Chadbourne Street and Irving Street. The site was near the Art Museum and the busy historic district of Downtown San Angelo. A recreational trail along the river was being redesigned, enhancing these spaces. The trail to the south was subject to an increasing amount of pedestrian traffic once the improvements have been completed. This combined with the high vehicular and pedestrian traffic on Chadbourne Street posed an opportunity to have a lot of movement through the site. The proximity to the center of San Angelo, the increased traffic around the site, and the amount of vacancy on this block made the selection ideal for this proposal.

As preparation for the design intensive portion of this project, a list of program elements was compiled for the sustainable dining campus. It essentially consists of primary spaces and secondary spaces. The primary space encompasses the urban farming exterior space, supporting facilities, the food preparation area, restaurant, and entertainment space. Due to the large scope and site, the primary spaces were predominantly focused on throughout Polyark/World Tour. The secondary spaces are the research facilities, auditorium, classroom space, museum, and welcome center. Although the secondary spaces were not designed, the master plan designates a location for these facilities.

Within the block, two curved walkways move people from the northern corners of the city block through the campus to the trail and vice versa. As people move through the site, they will see a succession of buildings dedicated to agricultural advancements focusing on sustainability. These facilities are deemed the secondary spaces and range from research facilities to an educational center for the public. In the center of the site is a restaurant and dance hall. These exist to show how sustainable dining can come full circle. The slope of the site has been terraced to provide ample space for harvesting crops. These crops go directly to the restaurant to be used in providing the people of San Angelo fresh food in a sustainable way. The restaurant will only use local crops and meat from local farms to reinforce this mission.

On the surface, San Angelo seems like an average small town, but it does not take long for people to notice that something else is happening. San Angelo is not a city afraid of change; the inhabitants push for improvements constantly. The majority of the citizens want to see the city as a whole succeed while keeping the small town community that first attracted people to the oasis of west Texas. An agricultural center such as this can solidify San Angelo's notability while supporting the businesses that founded the city hundreds of years ago.

Unique Design Contributions through Travel

While traveling, I visited a wide spectrum of cities including the developing national capital of Mongolia, the booming metropolis of Shanghai, the historically grounded cities of Spain, and the experimental area of Masdar City. These cities, just to name a few, combined to shape my view on San Angelo. Through the semester coursework, connections between seemingly irrelevant places were made. The same design principles were used to design a cool microclimate in the streets of Masdar City as were used in the market streets of Fez, Morocco. A series of similar types of connections led me to better understand and appreciate the practicality of traveling as it relates to design.

To further aid these design connections, each student kept a design library consisting of thumbnail sketches. One column would consist of quick sketches of precedents with a focus on design principles, planning principles, ordering systems, or detail characteristics. A second column served to facilitate a translation of these precedents into studio project implementations. There is a visible connection between the precedent studies done while traveling and the final design produced. These are evident in the sketches on the final presentation board. The final product of the design library included the Alhambra in Grenada, Spain, the Lingering Gardens of Suzhou, China, Villa d'Este outside of Rome, Italy, Park Güell in Barcelona, Spain, and Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

These are only a few of the places that inspired the design in San Angelo, Texas. The San Angelo sustainable dining campus design proved to have been enriched by being able to employ and integrate design principles directly observed during the Polyark/World Tour study abroad experience.

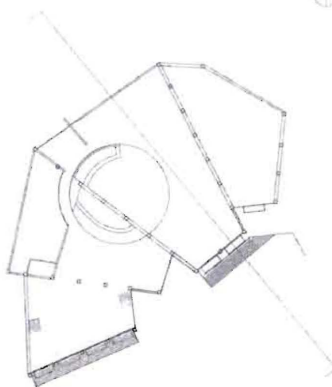
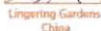
Lasting Impact of Design-Based Study / Travel

The ideas behind the design library did not end upon the return from the semester abroad. These precedents and experiences in foreign cities continue to inform design studio projects. The extent to which Polyark/World Tour affects my outlook as a designer became very clear the semester following the study abroad experience. Another World Tour participant and I entered a design competition rethinking and redesigning an abandoned, elevated railway system. A bike path ran the length of the three and a half mile long railway, but our design focused on a block long patch of this trail. Our project pulled inspiration from the countless public spaces studied while abroad. We focused on how the spaces interacted with each other and how people would move through the neighborhood. The project dealt with a range of scales from the local bus stops' connectivity to the opportunities for future development along the trail. All of these influences gained from studying design by traveling resulted in our project being awarded first place in the competition.

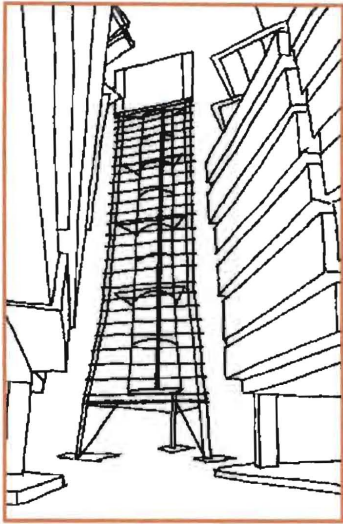
Conclusions

Design principle is universal, and these global concepts can be applied to any city. It seems to be a common misconception that great design is only seen in the towering metropolises of the world. Traveling with design in mind has proven that good design can happen anywhere. Growing communities are perhaps in most need of designers willing to apply a global knowledge to a local setting. The world has a vast physical memory that manifests itself in cities of what does and does not work. Architects need to take advantage of the world as a resource in order to implement designs that can better society instead of repeating past failures.

Enjoying Fresh Food
Supporting Local Business
Fostering Sustainable Research
Setting a Foundation for Growth in San Angelo

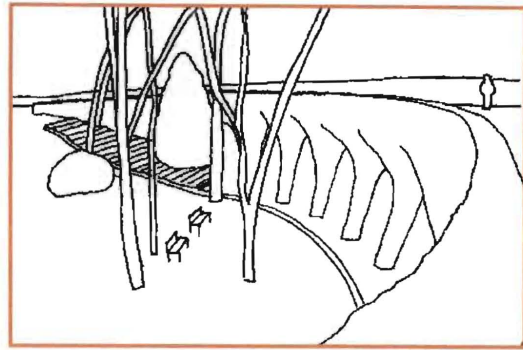






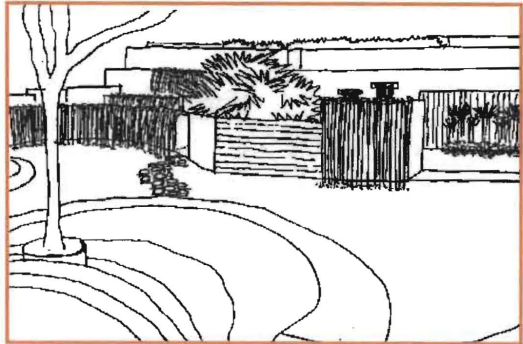
Masdar City
UAE

Narrow Walkways - Cool Microclimate



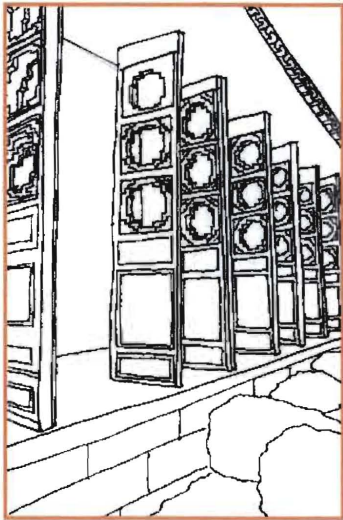
Park Guell - Spain

Elevated Walkways



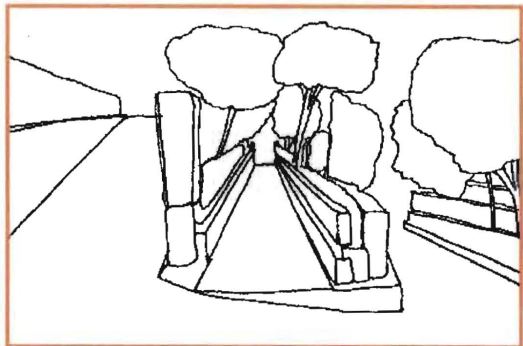
Petronas Towers Garden
Malaysia

Terraces to Water



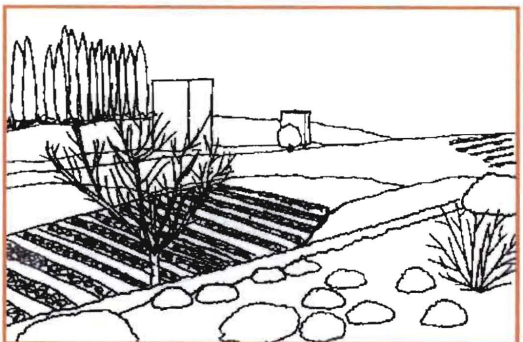
Lingering Gardens
China

Doors - Open Walls and Create Views



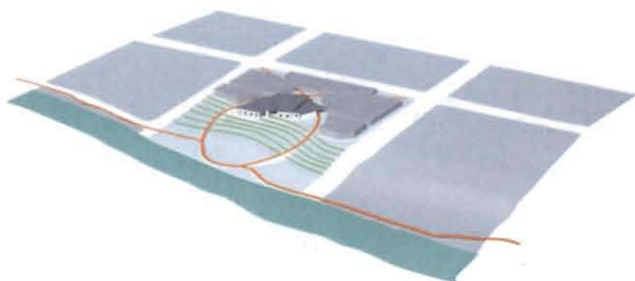
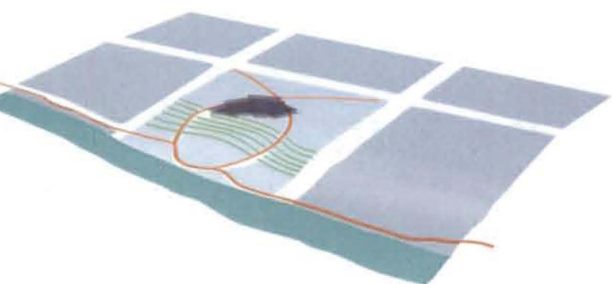
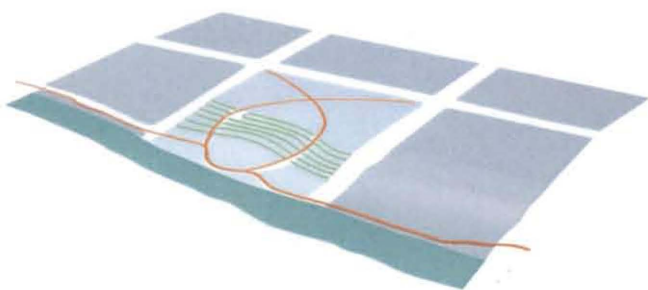
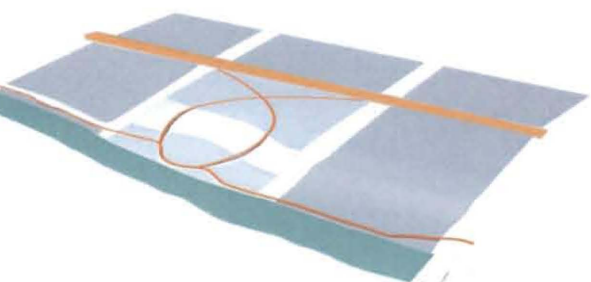
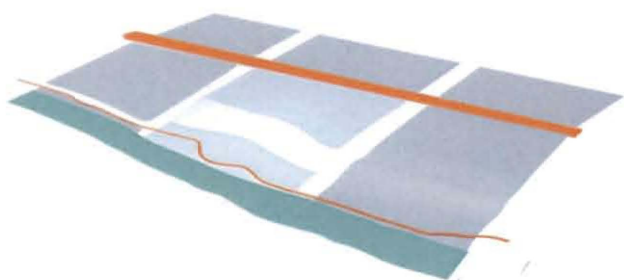
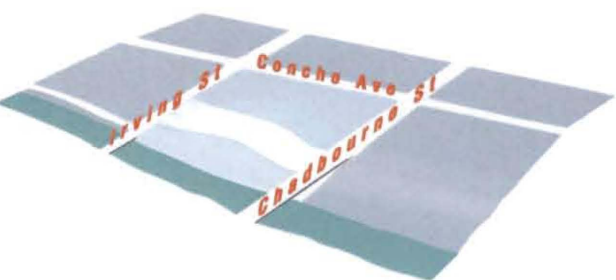
Villa d'Este - Italy

Pathway Options



Alhambra Gardens
Spain

Local Crops Sold Locally





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